

Testimony of Wendy Yagarich, Director of Programs
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240 Main Street
Norwich, CT 06360

Prepared for the Appropriations Committee
Public Hearing – March 3, 2015
Public Hearing on the Governor's Proposed Budget

Good afternoon Senator Bye, Representative Walker and Committee Members;

My name is Wendy Yagarich and I am the Director of Programs at Madonna Place in Norwich. Our agency is a nonprofit that serves over 3000 parents and children each year from New London County.

My testimony is in opposition to the proposed Elimination of the Family School Connection Program and the Family Empowerment Program. These monies are from the Children's Trust Fund which is now part of the Family Support Services Division in the Office of Early Childhood.

The funds to our agency are:

- **\$181,554 for the Family School Connections Program**
- **\$42,642 for the Family Empowerment Program**

Family School Connection Programs are located in New Haven, Middletown and Norwich. This is a prevention program that provides comprehensive home visiting and support services for families whose children are frequently absent, truant, have academic or behavior problems, or often come to school unprepared. In addition, the program provides services to parents who are not adequately engaged with the school or attending to their child's educational needs. Children who are not getting their needs met are at greater risk for developmental, behavioral and health issues – issues that too often lead to school failure. Our Family School Connection Program is housed in Wequonnoc and John M. Moriarty Elementary schools in Norwich.

The goals of Family School Connection are to improve parenting skills and help families support their child's educational success. A major role of program staff is to help parents address issues that are interfering with their ability to meet the needs of the child. Cutting funding for this program will leave many families with less support and in turn will affect children's education. The program is an innovative program that supports parents and can have a positive impact on students' performance. Cutting this program is not aligned with Governor Malloy's plan to invest in education.

Family School Connection is evaluated by the University of Hartford Center for Social Research. Their research shows that parents who participate in the program:

- Spend more time helping their children with homework and listening to them read
- Are significantly more involved with their child's school and education
- Have improved parenting attitudes and behaviors
- Develop goals, plans, and problem solving skills
- Take hold of and meet the demands of parenting

The Family Empowerment Program funds fatherhood programming at our agency. The program specifically works with young fathers who are in need of support early on in their parenting. The program focuses on prevention by encouraging and strengthening new fathers with child development education, case management, and group services. Research shows that children without fathers are more likely to be placed in foster care, to be placed on state assistance, to drop out of school, to have kids before they reach 20, to go to jail, to have their own children removed from their care among other things. Prevention works. Fathers who have completed the program know it works. The question is how to do it. Every day we work on the solution. Every day we help fathers engage with their children.

Research shows that when children have involved parents, those children will have higher grades and better school attendance, feel better about themselves, and have fewer behaviors problems. Healthy educated children grow into productive adults, contributing more to society and pose fewer burdens on public support systems than those whose early lives lack proper nurturing and support.

Please do not cut funding to the Family School Connection or the Family Empowerment Programs.

Children in Connecticut are counting on you.

Thank you for your time.